DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 148 SP 037 752

AUTHOR Shannon, Isabelle L.; Bergdoll, Carla B.
TITLE ASEP: A Model for Professionalism in a Successful Postbaccalaureate Secondary Certification Program for Career Changers.
PUB DATE 1998-02-18
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (New Orleans, LA, February 25-28, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Learning; *Alternative Teacher Certification; *Career Change; Curriculum Development; Graduate Study; Higher Education; Life Events; *Nontraditional Students; Preservice Teacher Education; Secondary Education; Secondary School Teachers; Standards; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS *Professionalism

ABSTRACT

The Alternative Secondary Education Program was designed to provide an alternative pool of teachers with the maturity to interact with today's adolescents and ability to draw from life and career experiences to design interesting, relevant lessons. The program follows the AACTE-recommended standards for teacher education (selective admission standards, a curriculum that emphasizes knowledge and skills essential to beginning teachers, supervised internships, and an examination measuring competency in subject matter and professional studies). The program curriculum accommodates the needs of diverse alternative (nontraditional) students. For example, the 18-credit-hour sequence was reconfigured into three 3-credit courses. Candidates can complete the program more quickly or slowly, depending on their needs. The program offers easy access to support services, flexible hours, and conveniently located facilities. Candidates are continually encouraged to identify life and career experiences that they can incorporate into lesson plans, since it is life experiences that differentiate them from typical undergraduates. The program emphasizes diversity, classroom management, and multiple intelligences. Many adult learners are distressed by the challenges of balancing their personal lives with commitment to the program. Others have difficulty changing their old notions of teaching, learning, youth, and classrooms. Many find it hard to become novices again after having been successful in another career. Surveys of program completers indicate they liked the program because it was tailored to their needs and offered quality instruction. (Contains 13 references.) (SM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 417 148

ASEP: A MODEL FOR PROFESSIONALISM IN A SUCCESSFUL POSTBACCALAUREATE SECONDARY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM FOR CAREER CHANGERS

Isabelle L. Shannon, Ph D
Professor of Education
Coordinator, Education Department

Carla B. Bergdoll, Ed S.
Academic Advisor-Alternative Certification Program

Virginia Wesleyan College
1584 Wesleyan Drive
Norfolk, VA 23502

Same

(757) 455-3395(w)
FAX (757) 455-5703
e-mail: ishannon@vwc.edu

areas of specialization: teacher education (secondary) and alternative certification

supervision of student teachers and alternative certification programs

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

I. Shannon

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

sb031992

MEETING THE NEEDS OF NONTRADITIONAL CANDIDATES IN AN ALTERNATIVE SECONDARY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM FOR CAREER SWITCHERS

The nontraditional candidate with career and life experience coming into teaching has a very different set of characteristics and needs than the traditional undergraduate. Twelve years of experience in working with this population tells us how these needs can be met in a well-designed, carefully-implemented alternative certification program that has quality and rigor.

Like many alternative certification programs ASEP (Alternative Secondary Education Program) was designed in response to the critical shortage of teachers in 1985 and begun in 1986. The program continues because it provides an alternate candidate pool of teachers for the schools: prospective teachers who have the maturity to interact with today's adolescents and who have life and career experience from which they can draw to design interesting, engaging, relevant lessons for learners.

Before this program began, discussions were held at state Association of Colleges of Teacher Education meetings with colleagues in public and private institutions, consultation with state department of education officials was ongoing, a needs assessment was done in local public schools systems and the local target population was surveyed. Following that, an agreement was reached to develop a program to prepare grade 7-12 teachers in math, science, English, and foreign language. Later social studies was added due to high demand from quality applicants and interest from the school systems. ASEP has endured because it was framed using the AACTE standards, because standards of quality have been enforced to build a reputation with local school systems, because it has evolved overtime to meet the needs of these nontraditional candidates and

because it has served to prepare candidates who have multiple career and life experiences with appropriate professional knowledge to engage today's students in learning. Those teacher candidates who complete the program are highly prized by local school systems.

Program standards

When the program was structured, the four AACTE-recommended standards for teacher education programs were adopted: *selective admissions standards, a curriculum focused on knowledge and skills essential to the beginning teacher, a supervised internship, and an examination that measures competency in subject matter and professional studies* (AACTE, 1983). These standards have been maintained because twelve years of experience demonstrate that they provide a framework for success and do indeed help to ensure quality and rigor.

Careful attention is paid to the selection process. *Success in producing outstanding teachers . . . is determined in large measure by the quality of candidates admitted* (Andrew, 1997). Candidates for ASEP must have a degree from an accredited college or university with a major in the endorsement area or equivalent course work to meet state certification standards, significant career experience and a 2.5 cumulative grade point average. They must engage in an interview during which their qualifications and dispositions toward teaching are assessed. Any additional required or recommended course work for the endorsement area and/or for recency is prescribed in writing at this time to permit the applicant to make a decision for program entry based on all the known facts. Originally candidates had to pass the core battery and the specialty area of the National Teachers Examination. Now they must pass Praxis I and the requisite specialty area of Praxis II. Because their degrees were earned at other institutions and not all have been working in their content area, passing scores must be submitted in advance of preservice

teaching in an effort to ensure adequate content knowledge.

The candidate pool

These days many individuals find themselves making a career change. Downsizing has become a way of life in the military and in the corporate sector forcing people to find another career. Others find themselves in careers which have not met expectations in terms of satisfaction. Some wish to become teachers in order to have a work schedule which is more conducive to parenting. These candidates bring rich experience to teaching. For example, previous fields or occupations include medical technology, engineering, the military, journalism, forestry, paralegal/attorney, geologist, household executive, counselor, private enterprise, teacher(substitute/assistant), and computer operator/specialist.

When asked why they were choosing to teach at this point in their lives, some responded, *I have always wanted to teach. When the time came for a career change, I could afford to do it.* Others replied, *I was sidetracked by marriage and family.* A prospective English teacher said, *I had an empty nest; I needed new fledglings. It was time to fulfill my goals.* Another typical response: *I am a private school teacher who wants to become fully certified.* Some have teachers in their family; some have substituted or worked as teachers' aides, others with no contact with the schools except their own experience or their children's see teaching as a career where they can give something back to society. The program also attracts native speakers of foreign language, especially Spanish, since that is a high demand area. Some who get interested in coaching decide to become teachers in order to continue that activity. Often local school system officials recommend this program to prospective teachers because of the reputation of the program and the program alumni successfully teaching in their schools. Several of the independent schools have

hired teachers and then suggested that they pursue certification requirements through the program. As Andrew (1997) asserts, *the ability to attract more good candidates is closely linked to the reputation of teacher education programs.*

Characteristics and needs of the adult learner

The research on the adult learner shows that adults choose to participate in institutionally planned learning that is necessary to prepare for a new job or occupation and especially to achieve a goal such as teacher certification (Long, 1983, p. 216) when a shorter, faster route is available. Many adults with family responsibilities have neither the time nor the financial means to enroll in a traditional program. In addition, they need to feel that their life experience is valued.

The concept of the adult learner as an experienced person engaged in learning is among the most popular in the adult education literature because it is a powerful distinguishing feature. Schwertman (1960) attributed the following conceptualization of adult experience to Houle: *Adults have more experiences, adults have different kinds of experiences and the life experiences of adults are organized differently.* It is Long (1983), however, who has synthesized the implication of experience for the education of adults. The experience of living involves changes of direction and challenge over a long period of time, which has resulted in personal growth and development--in essence, adults have already been partly educated by life (Long, 1983, p. 223). Houle (1981) notes that adults fulfilling a need are goal-oriented and seek to find a practical way to satisfy their chosen goal. The description of the evolving curriculum will show how these needs have been kept in mind.

When adults participate in institutionalized learning activities, they are also concerned with the geographical proximity of facilities and ease of accessing necessary services. In particular, the availability and accessibility of libraries, bookstores, the educational institution itself, discussion

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

groups, counseling, and other sources of help and materials may be significant factors in their choice of institution and program (Tough, 1979, p.188). Knowles (1970) issues a reminder that Maslow's hierarchy of needs will be helpful in prescribing certain conditions that should be considered by the planner of educational activities for adults.

The evolving curriculum

To meet the needs of these postbaccalaureate certification candidates a curriculum was structured just for them. An eighteen (18) credit- hour sequence was reconfigured into 3 three-credit courses with strands that begin in the first course and continue through the program. Candidates must complete the courses in foundations and educational psychology in the summer or fall before they undertake their content-area methods class and the practicum in the spring. They must also complete an observation experience in a public middle or high school during the fall semester to confirm their commitment to students, teaching, and working conditions. The practicum is a supervised ten-week full time student teaching experience in a public school that is accompanied by a weekly seminar. It is possible for a well-qualified candidate to complete the program in two semesters, about 60% choose to do so. Others who wish to proceed at a slower pace or who may need additional course work in their certification area may begin in summer, attend fall and spring, and complete in the following fall with the practicum. Flexibility is important to some adult learners; therefore, the program is designed to let candidates move in and out at certain times.

The courses form a cohesive whole. To that end many strands are introduced in the foundations course. Topics such as the purpose of the public school, the history and philosophy of education, challenging issues in today's society and legal concerns are the cornerstones of that

class, other topics such as a profile of today's diverse learners, learning styles, effective teaching strategies, alternative assessment, classroom management and discipline and the use of technology are introduced and then are continued as strands through the educational psychology course and the methods class and student teaching seminar. The instructors of the foundations classes make a conscious effort to model as many teaching strategies as possible and to make a series of "asides" during the semester to help the students make connections between the theory and practice in the college classroom and the public school classroom. They are then asked to make their own connections when they must design and implement a fifteen minute lesson on one of a list of pre-selected topics such as the role of the principal, cooperative learning or charter schools. This provides an opportunity for the instructor to assess teaching potential and for candidates to receive constructive feedback from the instructor and their peers. These basic lessons create one strand that will prepare them for the methods class.

In the Educational Psychology course the instructor includes content on human growth and development and continues the emphasis on the learners by enlarging upon the strand of diversity. The focus is on understanding cultural diversity, learning theory, motivation, and cognitive strategies. Practical ways to help learning disabled and gifted students are included. There is opportunity to compare and contrast traditional and more recent definitions of intelligence including the concept of multiple intelligences. Students assess their own intelligences using the inventory provided by Armstrong (1994). Other strands which are enlarged are devising and using objectives and assessment of learning.

The methods classes are taught by curriculum specialists from local school divisions which helps us keep the program grounded in the practical realities of the public school setting.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The courses focus on content-specific methods and strategies but also provide practical information on classroom management and discipline, as well as opportunities to design units and lessons and to implement mini-lessons on specific topics in their content area. Every such experience in the program provides them with feedback on their teaching from instructors and peers.

Throughout the program candidates are encouraged to identify experiences in their lives and former careers which they can incorporate into lesson plans and use with students to make classroom instruction relevant to the real world. As Sarason (1993) asserts, *To ignore what the would-be teacher knows and has experienced . . . is to seal off a gold mine in the face of poverty.*

All aspects of the program have been under continual review since its inception in an effort to stay on the cutting edge of teacher education. As more research has appeared, segments of the program have been evaluated in that light. Goodlad's postulates (1990) were most helpful in encouraging us to continue ongoing practices such as the discussion of current issues and tensions in the schools (Postulate Twelve), and to pay more attention to the formal development of critical thinking (Postulate Seven). We added a component to the foundations class that requires for much of the semester a weekly two-page analysis of an issue taken from the readings and touched on in class such as explaining their position on charter schools, local control of schools, fact-oriented assessment tests v. instruments that require reasoning and comparing and contrasting current instructional practices with those that they experienced in high school.

Empirical observation in schools and feedback from students made it imperative to place more emphasis on classroom management and discipline as well as the diversity of learners. The

research on multiple intelligences and the examples of multiple strategies to accommodate the needs of students (Armstrong, 1994) is introduced in the foundations class and continued in the other two courses. The concept of authentic teaching, learning and assessment is introduced in the foundations class and continued as a strand also. Students are provided examples of exhibitions (Sizer, 1992) and encouraged to develop their own.

The latest initiative in the ASEP program will be to develop technology standards that comply with those about to be approved and mandated by the state. Candidates will be able to demonstrate their mastery of these standards (some come to us with superb computer skills) or take an additional course in technology. In a 1997 survey program completers asked us to consider adding a course on special needs-students to the program. In subsequent deliberations it will be important to study where the balance point is in providing an adequate professional education program while offering a program that candidates can complete in a reasonable length of time.

Meeting other needs

As stated earlier, adults look for proximity of facilities, easy access to necessary support services and a support system. ASEP is administered through the Adult Studies Program Office which is open until 8 p.m. each evening. This office is where candidates request information, submit applications, make interview and advising appointments, come for appointments and register and pay for classes. When the program was smaller, books were made available there also; now there are extended evening hours in the bookstore for a few days at the beginning of each semester. Information and orientation sessions are held several times a year in a nearby classroom. This helps the adult students get to know each other and the staff as well as to be sure

that they have adequate information. Staff members are friendly and available and become part of the support system.

In addition to staff support, we have intentionally used the idea of cohort groups from the beginning in order to foster the establishment of relationships among students for personal, academic and professional support. The initial cohort group had ten students; subsequent cohorts numbered 20 to 25. The next growth spurt produced two groups of twenty each. The maximum was three groups of twenty. However, this strained our faculty resources for the beginning two classes as well as the more populated content methods classes so we decided to stay with approximately forty beginning students divided into two sections who were regrouped into five classes for methods and then combined into one group for the student teaching seminar, a required weekly activity during the preservice teaching practicum. Because of attrition and differing needs, the size of this seminar group ranges from seven to twenty-four per semester. One of the strengths cited consistently in surveys is the strong support and camaraderie found in their cohort groups.

Comparison with typical undergraduates

The research outlines the diversity in backgrounds in today's learners and the many changes in society that produce learners who are unmotivated and who see no connection between school and the real world. It is difficult for the typical undergraduate to have the maturity and experience to reach those learners. In addition, the ASEP candidates have consistently scored higher on the NTE because of their life experience. There is not as much difference between the two populations in test results on Praxis I but there is still considerable difference on Praxis II.

Career changers tend to be more able to elaborate concepts and can more easily find

examples to bridge the gap between the classroom and the world outside.

Challenges of working with this population

Many of these adults are stressed by the challenges of balancing their personal life (family, present job, finances) with their commitment to the certification program. Some need to withdraw from the program or delay course work or student teaching due to personal illness (self or family), depleted finances for a number of reasons, divorce, loss of the temporary job that would enable them to save for the student teaching practicum, waiting for the perfect time to leave the present job, cancellation of promised leave of absence, lack of home support to return to school or an unrealistic view of the complexity of teaching. One example is that of the Navy captain who persisted in his belief that teaching was easy and required little time and effort. Three weeks into his student teaching experience he confessed that he had not taken leave from his military position but had been going to his work site early in the morning, then going to the local high school, and then returning to work. The demands of this schedule became overwhelming and he had to withdraw.

Whenever possible, instructors and advisors provide a listening ear and sometimes a creative solution for whatever problem has come up. Sometimes the best help is to accept the student's statement of the problem and not try to suggest solutions. It has been our experience that some adult learners come to a realization that teaching is a more complex activity than they had thought but find it difficult to express their true feelings and are choosing this way to "save face" when withdrawing from the program.

The most difficult challenge is that of helping some of these candidates evaluate their

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

attitudes toward teaching, learning, young people and the classroom. They may have an old image of what schools were like when they attended. Getting them to take a realistic view is difficult. Some, for example, think that the teacher they are observing in their early 12 clock-hour field experience is not enough of an authority figure. While that may be true, today's young people may need a different approach. While we try to encourage candidates who are more representative of the diverse student population, many of these candidates are white, middle-class and value education. They think that their students' backgrounds and attitudes will be similar. Many need to become aware that students come from diverse backgrounds with difficult and legitimate concerns; teachers must learn to teach all of the young people, not just the model students they would like to have.

Often candidates who have done some teaching during their the military service think that there will be transfer from those previous teaching experiences. They may need to be educated to the reality that, unlike those who learned the content from the traditional lecture to make their next rank, many of today's public school students are unmotivated and do not want to be in that classroom. It is important to learn motivational strategies as well as a variety of teaching techniques. They realize that military discipline methods cannot be used but they can be resistant to employing some of the necessary classroom management strategies not only in discipline but in effective lesson design. Those who are able to identify and evaluate their attitudes and procedures and who are flexible enough to change are usually successful in teaching; those who persist in their rigid thinking are not.

These teacher candidates may have difficulty understanding why they need to study some of the material in the foundations and psychology courses when they are impatient to learn

teaching methodology. This is addressed by explaining why each of the topics is important as well as emphasizing the advantages and disadvantages of the particular teaching method or strategy that is being used that evening by the instructor.

Questions arise from time to time concerning what candidates are seeing in the schools and classrooms to which they have been assigned for observation. During discussion the focus is kept on helping them connect actions of perceived positive and negative teacher models with the resulting behavior and learning of the students rather than on criticizing the practitioner. There is also a suggestion that during the observation the candidate think about how they would interact with these learners if placed in a similar situation.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the candidate is the student teaching experience. For ten weeks the adult learner who has been successful in another career must undergo the difficult experience of becoming a novice again. Our study of these candidates over the twelve years reveals that some adults are able to make the transition into teaching with little difficulty, perhaps exhibiting only the normal kinds of problems that come with experience. Others often project a false sense of confidence that they do not feel and may demonstrate an inability to ask for help. This may be coupled with a reluctance on the part of the cooperating teacher to provide honest feedback or an inability on the part of the adult learner to accept and implement the suggestions that are provided. Some experience regression and fall back on traditional methods that represent the way in which they were taught. Others are more able to take risks and implement some of the newer, more effective strategies they have learned in their methods class. This is sometimes influenced by whether or not this initiative is supported by the cooperating teacher mentor. After all, this teacher will be assisting in evaluation and may be writing a recommendation for the

candidate.

The college supervisor keeps in close touch by monitoring weekly lesson plans and cooperating-teacher weekly report forms, by being available for consultation, and by making at least four visits to provide assistance during the ten-week experience. The supervisor also attempts to mediate any unresolved issues between the student teacher and the mentor teacher.

There needs to be room in the experience for the candidate to teach from the strengths of their life experience to engage students in learning. For example, one individual who had had a career in the Navy as a meteorologist was able to interest students in his science class with the role that tracking weather patterns plays in determining the movements of ships at sea including simulations of war games. A former engineer interested students in mathematics with examples of the effect of accurate calculations in determining stresses in buildings and bridges. A native speaker of Spanish was able to integrate teaching culture along with the language in a way that permitted students to understand cultural differences as well as become motivated to speak the language

Candidate Satisfaction

In the first survey administered in the fall of 1989 candidates reported that they liked the program because it is tailored to the needs of the adult learner and the course work is geared directly to job requirements. They selected the program because of the reputation of the college, the program and the instructors. They considered it cost-effective in that it can be completed within a year. It provides a shorter, more flexible route to certification. Since the courses (except for the practicum) are offered at night, they can continue their current job, substitute teach in local schools or continue to provide at-home daytime child care. They are able to select

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

themselves out of the program with a minimal investment of time and money if they discover that teaching is not for them. A certification-only program meets their needs because they may already have a master's degrees or do not want to spend the time or resources to obtain one at this time. Many said that they would not have considered teaching if an alternative route to certification had not been provided (Shannon, 1990). Each year since the initial survey, participants have been invited to provide feedback. The responses have been consistent with the original survey.

On a questionnaire administered in the spring of 1997, program completers were again asked what they had liked about the ASEP program. Over and over their responses mentioned the quality instruction, the small classes (under 25), expert guidance from the staff, and great support and camaraderie in their cohort group.

When asked what they could offer in a classroom over traditionally trained teachers, they mentioned their maturity, life and career experience, management skills, broader range of experience, knowledge and expertise and much more awareness of the needs of adolescents.

This helps to explain the significant record of hiring by local and out-of-state school systems. Administrators working with these teachers were surveyed initially in 1990 and have consistently provided excellent evaluations since of their performance in preservice teaching and have commented informally as well. In the initial survey they felt that the program offered well-prepared teachers with maturity and varied life experience. They also cited the benefits of the men retiring from the military who were positive role models in a community where there are many single-parent families and military families where the father may be deployed for months at sea (Shannon, 1990). Recently we have also worked with a few women who have retired from the military and also have noted that some of the deployed persons may be mothers. The program

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

continues to attract candidates because it has a twelve-year history as a postbaccalaureate program of helping qualified adults become effective teachers. The number of school divisions providing observation and student teaching experiences has grown from three to eight. This growth has now expanded to the maximum geographical distance for which we can provide adequate supervision.

Implications for the future

In order to evaluate the program and make plans for the future a survey of program completers has been done every five years and informal opportunities are provided annually for participants to offer comments and suggestions. In addition to making changes based on this feedback, consultation continues with local school system authorities. Plans are to keep the program in place as long as a strong pool of candidates exists, the market is favorable and support continues from local school divisions and state officials.

Twelve years of working with this population demonstrates that quality and rigor can be enforced in a model program that provides an abbreviated route to certification. This model could be replicated in institutions where the climate is favorable for this degree of communication, collaboration, attention to student needs and adherence to quality standards. It serves as a way of bringing people into the schools who can offer some interesting options for students. However, some schools may need to become more flexible in curriculum design to accommodate to the new possibilities for using these teachers more effectively.

References

Andrew, M.D. (1997). What matters most for teacher educators. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 48(3), 167-176.

Armstrong, T. (1994). *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom.* Alexandria: ASCD.

Goodlad, J. I. (1990). *Teachers For Our Nation's Schools.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Houle, C. O. (1961) *The Inquiring Mind.* University of Wisconsin Press.

Knowles, M. S. (1970). *The Modern Practice of Adult Education.* New York: Association Press.

Long, H. B. (1983). *Adult Learning: Research and Learning.* New York, New York: Cambridge.

Sarason, S. B. (1993). *The Case For Change.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schwertman, J. B. (1960). The Intellectual Challenge of Adult Education. In Marilyn V. Miller (Ed.), *On Teaching Adults: An Anthology.* Boston: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults.

Shannon, I. L. (1990). ASEP-An alternative certification program for career switchers that works. *Action in Teacher Education,* XII(2), 38-42.

Sizer, T. R. (1992). *Horace's School: Redesigning the American High School.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Stern, Bernard H. (1960). The Teaching of Adults. In M. V. Miller (Ed.), *On Teaching Adults: An Anthology.* Boston: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults.

Tough, A. (1979). *The Adult's Learning Projects.* Toronto: Learning Concepts.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE